

A Teacher’s Guide: Keeping Your Most At-Risk Students in
Class and in School—and out of the Juvenile Justice
System

Shifting to a More Responsive and Reflective Approach

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Goals for Today’s Workshop



- **Identify student behaviors** that are most frequently met with ineffective disciplinary action, contributing to student push out.
- **Contrast how a punitive teacher reacts** to student behavior **with how a responsive teacher reflects** on their own and student behavior.
- Describe how teachers can **help reduce student push-out** by shifting their behavior from punitive and reactive to responsive and reflective.

Being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a **twofold increase** in the likelihood of dropping out, from 16% for those not suspended to 32% for those suspended just once (Balfanz, 2013).

National Data on Suspensions

- Black students 3xs more likely than white students to be suspended
- Hispanic students 2xs more likely than white students to be suspended

PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS
LEGAL VIEW

- Litigating cases
- Initiating federal investigations
- Implementing settlement agreements and consent decrees



PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS
EDUCATIONAL VIEW

- Macro/micro, institutional/interpersonal, in our control/not in our control
- Narrowing in on solutions: school-based factors
- Taking responsibility for our students—dismantling the pipeline in your classroom
- Teacher as change agent



“Principals, school resource officers, social workers, and more and more often law enforcement officials are charged with responding to school discipline problems.

But in reality, classroom teachers spend the most time with students. Their daily decisions can help divert students from the school to prison pipeline.”



Example: Punitive and Reactive
Teacher compared to Responsive and
Reflective Teacher

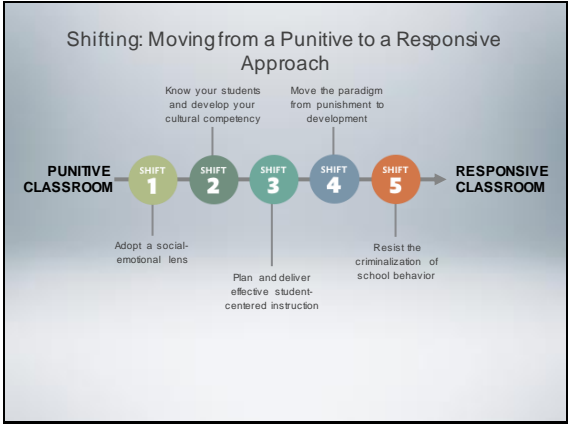
Student behavior: Student enters classroom, goes to desk, puts head down, and mumbles, “don’t mess with me today”

Punitive Teacher:
Beliefs: Student is high, stayed up all night, is going to cause problems and set bad example

Responsive Teacher:
Beliefs: I want to understand the underlying reason for this behavior and mitigate impact on teaching and learning

Reaction:

Reaction:



What are the student behaviors that at-risk students engage in that frequently result in punitive disciplinary action?

1. Disruptive in class
2. Verbal disrespect—just won't stop or let it go
3. Dress code violation
4. Lateness or truancy
5. "Aggressive", physical behavior
6. Fighting
7. Other: You name 'em

Meet Michael

Michael is 15 and repeating 9th grade this year. He is in your 1st period World History class.

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TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Disruptive in Class
Michael tilts his chair back and drums on his desk with a pencil while you're trying to teach.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- take Michael's pencil away
- move him from his seat
- kick him out of class for being disruptive, refer him for disciplinary action, possibly in school suspension



Meet Michael

Michael is 15 and repeating 9th grade this year. He is in your 1st period World History class.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Verbal Disrespect
Michael is defiant and uses inappropriate language when verbally redirected.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- verbally engage Michael in a back and forth during class
- kick Michael out of class for defiance
- refer Michael for disciplinary action, possibly in or out of school suspension



Meet Michael

Michael is 15 and repeating 9th grade this year. He is in your 1st period World History class.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Dress Code Violation
Michael comes to class without a belt on, pants sagging.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- lecture Michael during class for being out of uniform
- send Michael to the office for noncompliance
- refer Michael for disciplinary action, possibly in or out of school suspension



Meet Michael

Michael is 15 and repeating 9th grade this year. He is in your 1st period World History class.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Lateness or Truancy
Michael is frequently absent from or tardy to his first-period class and is failing.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- lock the classroom door when the bell rings, preventing Michael from joining his class
- give Michael zeros with no make up option for work he missed during unexcused absences

Meet Michael

Michael is 15 and repeating 9th grade this year. He is in your 1st period World History class.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Aggressive Physical Behavior
Michael shouldered his teacher out of the way when she blocked the classroom door as he tried to leave.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- call for the School Resource Officer who removes Michael and removes him from the building
- refuse to allow Michael back to class and insist that his schedule be changed
- press assault charges against Michael

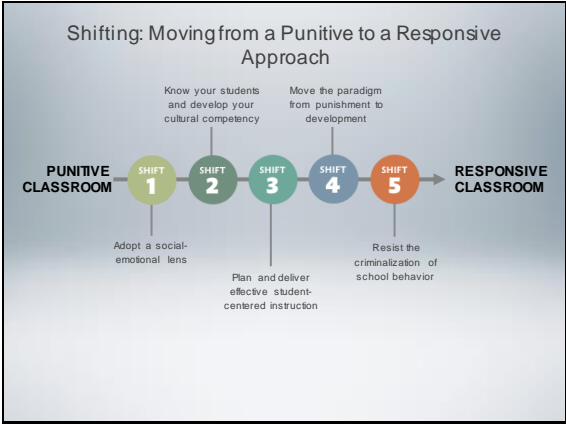
Meet Michael

Michael is 15 and repeating 9th grade this year. He is in your 1st period World History class.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Fighting
Michael got into a fight in the hallway during first period. There were no serious injuries.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- decide that they are not involved because the fight didn't happen in their class
- appeal to the administration that Michael poses a threat and should not be allowed back in class



TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Disruptive in Class
Michael tilts his chair back and drums on his desk with a pencil while you're trying to teach.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- take Michael's pencil away
- move him from his seat
- kick him out of class for being disruptive, refer him for disciplinary action, possibly in school suspension

Resist the criminalization of school behavior What are the implications for Michael if he gets suspended? Is it worth having him miss instruction?

SHIFT 5

Know your students and develop your cultural competency Maybe Michael enjoys or is comforted by percussive rhythms. I'll ask if he'd like to join the school band or drum line.

SHIFT 2

Plan and deliver effective student-centered instruction What kinesthetic or rhythmic strategies can I use in my lessons that might engage Michael?

SHIFT 3

Move the paradigm from punishment to development We'll start with the expectation that he not drum for the first 10 minutes of class. I'll offer him opportunity to create a rhyme or rap related to class content. After a week, I'll praise Michael's success and work with him to raise the expectation. Later, we'll do a rhympop together at school ceremony—if he meets expectations.

SHIFT 4

Adopt a social emotional lens What does the tapping tell me about Michael's mood? Is he bored or frustrated? Does the tapping bother other students or just me?

SHIFT 1

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Verbal Disrespect
Michael is defiant and uses inappropriate language when verbally redirected.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- verbally engage Michael in a back and forth during class
- kick Michael out of class for defiance
- refer Michael for disciplinary action, possibly in or out of school suspension

Resist the criminalization of school behavior What are the implications for Michael if he gets suspended? Is it worth him being out of school and missing instruction?

SHIFT 5

Know your students and develop your cultural competency I want to talk with Michael to find out what words, tone and body language I use that make him feel disrespected? I want to find common ground with him; can I do that and feel good about my role in the class?

SHIFT 2

Plan and deliver effective student-centered instruction How can I differentiate my instruction to better meet his needs, and tap his strengths and interests?

SHIFT 3

Move the paradigm from punishment to development We need to have a private conversation where I can validate Michael's feelings and maintain my authority. I'll use assertive communication, demonstrate empathy, explain disappointment, and set expectations for changed behavior.

SHIFT 4

Adopt a social emotional lens Could Michael's reaction to authority stem from feelings of powerlessness? How can I empower him so that he is less defensive when I assert my authority?

SHIFT 1

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Dress Code Violation
Michael comes to class without a belt on, pants sagging.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- lecture Michael during class for being out of uniform
- send Michael to the office for noncompliance
- refer Michael for disciplinary action, possibly in or out of school suspension

Resist the criminalization of school behavior Does enforcement of the dress code target particular students in my school? Do these infractions result in suspensions and lost learning time

Move the paradigm from punishment to development 9th grade teachers are sponsoring a "Sharp Dressed Club." Students who consistently meet the dress code each month will get special privileges (e.g., dress down day or pizza party). Consider an alternative dress day that isn't baggy pants and no belts, but does support choice and self-expression



SHIFT 1

Adopt a social emotional lens Does Michael have daily access to a belt that fits and that he is comfortable wearing? Should I keep an extra one in the classroom? What pressure is Michael feeling to wear sagging pants?

SHIFT 2

Know your students and develop your cultural competency I want to affirm for Michael that while cultural norms about clothing often differ at school and home, one is not better than the other. I want to help him understand the value and rationale for wearing his up.

SHIFT 3

Plan and deliver effective student-centered instruction How does my teaching affect my students' self-image? How can I motivate students to take pride and carry themselves as serious scholars? Can I help my students understand how clothing, style, and dress can have positive and negative ramifications by studying it?


TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Lateness or Truancy
Michael is frequently absent from or tardy to his first-period class and is failing.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- lock the classroom door when the bell rings, preventing Michael from joining his class
- give Michael zeros with no make-up option for work he missed during unexcused absences

Resist the criminalization of school behavior Truancy is the No. 1 predictor of delinquency leading to arrest and incarceration. Can our school provide free bus passes? Helping Michael now could have a significant impact on his future

Move the paradigm from punishment to development I worry that Michael is falling through the cracks. I'll call home and then set up a conference with family, teachers, and school staff to design a behavior intervention plan that supports him. I ask, and empower Michael to assume some ownership of the plan and his attendance.



SHIFT 1

Adopt a social emotional lens I will ask Michael about problems he's having getting to school on time, offering to listen and help. I will ask other teachers if they've noticed changes in his behavior and mood.

SHIFT 2

Know your students and develop your cultural competency Who is responsible for Michael's transportation? What is his morning routine? Is he caring for younger siblings? What are other members of his family doing in the morning? Do we have staff who live near Michael and would be able to give him a ride or stop by?

SHIFT 3

Plan and deliver effective student-centered instruction Is my curriculum relevant to Michael's identity and lived experiences? By missing class, is Michael willfully rejecting a class that does not include him? Am I doing all I can to give Michael a reason to want to be in school on time every day?

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR
Aggressive Physical Behavior
Michael shouldered his teacher out of the way when she blocked the classroom door as he tried to leave.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- call for the School Resource Officer who restrains Michael and removes him from the building
- refuse to allow Michael back to class and insist that his schedule be changed
- press assault charges against Michael

Resist the criminalization of school behavior How can I encourage my administration to consider creative interventions as alternatives to suspension and adjudication (e.g., peer mediation, conflict resolution, behavior intervention plans, restorative justice strategies)?

Move the paradigm from punishment to development Michael and I can come up with a signal to let me know he is feeling stressed and needs a 3-minute cool down. The school counselor can help him recognize those feelings before they overwhelm him. We are working on a plan to so that he can do some pre-reading to texts prior to class to improve his confidence and ability to keep pace.



SHIFT 1

Adopt a social emotional lens What class did I miss that he was upset before he tried to walk out? Did I exacerbate an already tense situation by blocking his way?

SHIFT 2

Know your students and develop your cultural competency What social and cultural capital did Michael risk if he had backed down from me in front of his peers? Should I have stepped into the hallway and helped diffuse the situation?

SHIFT 3

Plan and deliver effective student-centered instruction Michael has been intellible or absent since we've been reading more complex texts. Students who can't read proficiently by 4th grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. I will go to the literacy coach and special education team for tiered intervention strategies.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR

Fighting

Michael got into a fight in the hallway during first period. There were no serious injuries.

A PUNITIVE TEACHER'S REACTIONS

- decide that they are not involved because the fight didn't happen in their class
- Report the student's behavior to the principal
- Recommend suspension or detention
- Recommend referral to the school counselor
- Recommend referral to the school nurse
- Recommend referral to the school psychologist
- Recommend referral to the school social worker
- Recommend referral to the school administrator
- Recommend referral to the school board
- Recommend referral to the school district
- Recommend referral to the state
- Recommend referral to the federal government

SHIFT 1

Adopt a social emotional lens: how a student feels can define how he learns. What kind of hurt is Michael feeling because of the fight? How can I help him shake it off and feel more positive about school?

SHIFT 2

Know your students and develop your cultural competency. I respect and care about him, but he's going through things that I've never experienced. Who among my colleagues might be better able to connect with Michael?

SHIFT 3

Plan and deliver effective student-centered instruction. I'm concerned about my students' inability to nonviolently resolve conflict. How can I use our World History curriculum to highlight peace and conflict studies and make connections to my students' lives?

SHIFT 4

Move the paradigm from punishment to development. I've been talking with colleagues about having students trained in peer mediation. That would be a positive intervention strategy that could work well for Michael.


SHIFT 5

Consider creative interventions as alternatives to suspension and adjudication (i.e., peer mediation, conflict resolution, behavior intervention plans, restorative justice strategies)?



Questions/Ideas/Comments

Note: If you are a teacher or administrator who works in a youth correctional or detention setting and would like a presentation based on these same principles but that is aligned with the challenges of working in a secure setting just send us an email to ddomenici@ceeas.org.



For additional information or to learn more about our work visit our website at www.ceeas.org or drop me an email at ddomenici@ceeas.org.

Special thanks to Emily Chianello, a terrific teacher, friend, and advocate for system-involved kids.

